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GET INTO GAMES

A guide to working in the videogame industry



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It's the most exciting industry in existence. Exciting enough that just reading about it can be a buzz. Hearing about it, even thinking about it, can be enough to quicken your pulse. So who can resist the idea of working in it – getting an insider's perspective at the same time as helping to shape its future? Most people write the idea off as a hazy pipe dream or simply talk about it but do little else. But it's an industry that's growing at an extraordinary rate, and that growth can be explained by one factor: more and more people are making that move from fantasy to reality. Why not you?

It's not a straightforward move; it's an increasingly competitive space, and turning your hobby into a career is never without its risks – but it's becoming increasingly feasible. The growth of the videogame industry means that roles within it are becoming increasingly specialised. Where once you needed to be artist, coder, composer, PR and MD rolled into one, now you can target a specific job. If you're starting out, there are more and more courses designed to prepare you with the skills you need, and our selected listings (see page 19) can give you some ideas of where to start.

If you're already working, some of skills and experience you have may match up with the requirements of one of the areas of the videogame industry. But which area? How do you pick out the role that might suit you best? We've brought together eight industry insiders, representing a wide range of jobs the industry now offers, and asked them some of the questions you'd ask them if you had the opportunity. From the familiar roles of coder and artist, to emerging jobs like community manager, and the one that's thrown around every week via 'How do I become a videogame journalist?' emails we receive at **Edge**, it's a chance to see experienced people speaking frankly about the pitfalls and pleasures of the jobs they once dreamed of.

Once you've picked your role, you still have to decide how to get there: embark on a course, work with a recruitment agent, or strike out on your own. In the final section of this guide we pit veterans of each path against each other and ask them to explain why theirs is the best route into the videogame industry. Whoever you decide you agree with, it could be time to swap your fantasy for reality. After all, it's the most exciting industry in existence.



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The state of play

Like playing games? Want a job? If only it were so simple. But thanks to increasing professionalism in the industry, there are clear entry points for the right candidates

Like a drop of incandescence spreading across a sheet of plain blotting paper, games are slowly working their way into all aspects of society and culture. Costumed students play out the role of Pac-Man and ghosts in Central Park, burns victims use Game Boy Advances to help skin regrowth and, on BBC2, the technology behind the *Rome: Total War* strategy game is used to bring historic battles to life. In the hard world of business, media moguls and bankers have woken up to the fact that games such as *GTA: San Andreas* and *Halo 2* turn a bigger profit faster than Hollywood blockbusters. Equally, it's the billions of dollars of investment in semiconductor R&D by Sony and Microsoft which is creating the future of networked entertainment. Games are even having a profound impact on our personalities and how we choose to represent ourselves to others as we shift between real life and the game-style avatars we use to become characters in online communities.

But what's this got to do with a supplement about getting a job in the videogame industry? The fact is, as games spread, so the number of roles available grows and changes too. Whereas five years ago a perfectly adequate game could be knocked out by a programmer, a couple of artists and a part-time audio guy, now there are a huge number of specific roles to be filled: pathfinding coder, shader tool developer, concept artist, facial animation rigger – and that's just on the development side. Start taking into account the various support roles required for a successful game and job titles such as online communities manager, marketing events coordinator and brand evangelist become commonplace. As with factory production lines,

every task is being broken down into more specialised pieces.

It's both good and bad news for the prospective employee. Clearly, unless you are exceptional, it's unlikely you're going to walk into the position of being lead designer on a £10 million game straight from university. Specialised roles demand years of experience; a lesson veteran developers who haven't continued to improve their skillsets have learned thanks to a P45.

On the positive side, though, game recruitment is taken extremely seriously. With global players such as EA, Sony and Microsoft continuing to expand their operations, there exist full-time members of staff whose job is to recruit graduates. They offer well-structured training and career development as well as all the usual pension, health and other benefits you'd expect from blue-chip companies. But with such high levels of

means fewer still retire. In contrast, the university system is churning out a couple of thousand game-related graduates per year. It doesn't take a maths PhD to work out that the figures don't add up.

This doesn't mean a good degree is useless, of course, only that it's become an assumed starting point. What's more important is what you've done with the knowledge accumulated. The variety of free tools available on the internet, plus the scope of experiences available within the modding community, means there are more than enough opportunities for any prospective coder, artist or audio engineer to show what they can do under their own steam. And it's a similar situation in other parts of the industry, with blogs, clans, websites and forums acting as opportunities for gaining experience and building contacts. It will also go to prove your ability to work well within a

In the hard world of business, media moguls and bankers have woken up to the fact that games turn a bigger profit faster than Hollywood

professionalism involved, competition is extremely fierce and only the best get selected. For example, we know of one recruiter for a large publisher whose task for 2004 was to hire three graduate animators, but failed because she couldn't find the level of quality required. The days of filling new development teams with the output of the local college are long gone.

This does make the task of breaking into the industry more challenging, however. Certainly in terms of the UK, the consolidation of development studios means there's less opportunity to get a lucky break at a conversion house down the road. It's either gone bust, been taken over by Take Two or relocated to the nearest big city. The whole of the UK games industry is only reckoned to be around 10,000-strong, anyway. Few people ever seem to leave, while its members' relative youth

team – something which should be any employers' key requisite, considering the potential for 100-strong development teams over the next couple of years.

It's also important to realise that the videogame industry doesn't just consist of what's usually considered to be traditional game companies. The rise of the mobile phone means there are plenty of telecom companies, including the likes of Vodafone and Orange, which have gaming departments. Other companies in which gaming slips into a more massmarket form of entertainment include satellite broadcaster Sky, internet service providers such as Wanadoo and BT, as well as countless media, advertising and web design outfits. There are even art collectives and university research departments experimenting with new ways for games to spread further into culture. In fact there's pretty much every job imaginable. You just need the skill, enthusiasm and determination to go and get the one that's right for you.

Good luck.





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Profile: Designer

The creative spark behind a game, the designer ensures the finished product contains the excitement of that first inspiration

Role overview

It's tempting to advise people to forget about trying to become a game designer, at least at the graduate level. In terms of *Reservoir Dogs*, it's the Mr Black role everyone fights over. Even worse, while a development team might be 30+ strong, it will probably only have a couple of designers, and they may be working across other projects at the same time, so competition for jobs is extreme. Indeed, it's easier to say, in most cases, that designer is the one role in game development that you're born to, not trained for. On the positive side, however, it's also easy to over-estimate the importance of the designer within the creative process. Everyone in a team, from the junior coders to the concept artists, should be able to input into their game's design, so it's not as if you have to be a designer to get involved in design.

Of course, one area where the situation is different is level designer. As typically seen in the firstperson shooter market, this has long been an entry-level position where getting involved with the modding community and creating some well-paced deathmatch levels for *Counter-Strike* or *Unreal Tournament* becomes a calling card into professional development.

How does this role exist today? What's expected?

The role of the designer is to give shape to a game. As each team is made up of such a diverse collection of disciplines, designers must ensure that all the elements of a game fit together as a whole. We need to ensure that what is delivered to us is fitting of the game and is in a state where we can balance the elements together to produce a balanced gaming experience. A designer really needs to have an understanding of all the disciplines within a development team so that they can make solid decisions when requesting content or work from others.

What are the common misconceptions about game design as a career?

Many people who are entering the industry have little awareness of how the time of the designer is split up over the course of a project. Sure, there are periods where we research games, chat about what would be good, sit down and design the thing. All that time spent, be it days, weeks or months, is nothing compared to the time spent tuning and refining the experience once some code and content is laid down in front of you. The largest part of being a games designer is learning how things should be done, or set up, or displayed, or communicated – the list goes on. When you make it as a designer you still have everything to do and learn in order to produce the best game you can.

Q&A: SaiTong Man Designer at Ninja Theory



What tools do you use, and for what purposes?

Pretty much anything you can get your hands on to make life easier. You have to communicate yourself through whatever means, and that includes office applications (Word, Excel), 2D/3D packages (Maya, Photoshop, SketchUp) or just a pen and paper. Most importantly, you need to grasp what tools you're going to need yourself to set up the game, to help develop in-house tools to enable you to handle the massive amounts of data you have to manage and balance.

Visual debuggers are vital, normally requested and produced in-house so you can see how the game is behaving or not. Using these tools enables us to spot problems with the setup of the game and help iron them out.

"The most rewarding part of the job is seeing other people enjoy the game you helped put together. Nothing gives you more satisfaction"



Next-generation titles, such as Ninja Theory's *Heavenly Sword*, require an enormous amount of art assets, but while art staff headcounts continue to rise, designer headcounts do not. This is a competitive field

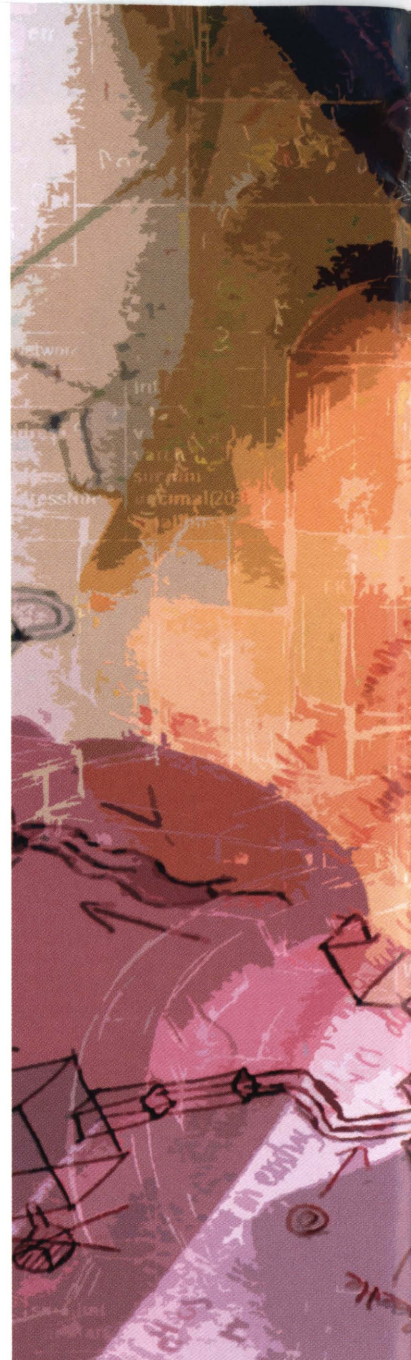
What experience is needed?

I think the best experience an aspiring designer can have is a great, intimate knowledge of a variety of games. To be able to draw from games, why and how they have been made the way they are, without cynicism, and to learn how to do better, or at the least imitate, simply by playing the games.

What are the common pitfalls designers face on projects in production nowadays?

The hardest aspect of the job is probably keeping the design up to date for all the people it involves. It is easy to forget to update design documentation as designs incrementally evolve and end, leaving the documentation to become completely obsolete.

Which parts of the job are most and least rewarding?





The most rewarding part of the job is obvious – seeing other people enjoy the game that you have helped put together. Nothing gives you more satisfaction than the enjoyment of others. What is probably the least rewarding aspect is not having the game reach the gamers. After working night and day to create a game, finishing it, receiving praise by the reviewers but then having the game ignored by the world as a whole due to lack of exposure or whatever, can be disheartening.

What's the most difficult part of your job as a designer?

Trying to accommodate everyone and forgetting about myself and sometimes only thinking about what I want and ignoring others. It is difficult to keep everyone happy. We are all enthused within our work. Ideas clash – some work, others don't have a leg to stand on – and saying no can be hard. Designers have fingers in all the pies, and as such many people depend on your answers to progress on their work.

At times of stress the questioning can be relentless and finding peace to do your own work can be difficult. Overcoming these issues can be taxing, but we all need to be level-headed and patient – most of the time people are only trying to help.

What makes a good designer?

All designers must be completely passionate about everything they do, regardless if it is actual game design or not. The role of a designer touches so many different things, and a good designer must approach everything that they do with a passion. But we must also be realists, we have to understand constraints and time scales, and we must have a definitive goal with respect to what we are achieving. Aimless, unconstrained design can get you nowhere very slowly.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to aspiring designers out there?

If you know what you want to achieve in the games industry, and you have the



The team behind *Counter-Strike* started out as amateurs: working on an FPS mod is an avenue into professional game design that's well worth considering

ideas to enable yourself to attain these goals, then go for it one hundred and ten percent. Some people have it easy getting into the position of designer, some have a hard graft getting there, but if you have what it takes then it will happen as long as the passion never dies. Take in and enjoy everything that comes your way – at the end of the day, it's all good.



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Profile: Artist

With graphics continuing to be the basis on which games are sold, there will always be a place for the talented artist

Role overview

Using the term 'artist' in the context of game development is now tantamount to a display of ignorance. No one is an 'artist' in these days, although there are plenty of texture artists, environmental artists, character artists, concept artists and effects artists, not to mention as many different flavours of animators and modellers. OK, lesson over, but the point is that – perhaps more than any other position – the increasing size of game development teams is being driven by a need for lots of different art-driven roles.

In many ways, this is good. For one thing it means there are plenty of opportunities for the well-trained graduate. Conversely, it means art is the most production-line part of game development, where dozens of creatives will end up toiling repetitively for 18 months to generate the huge background level of detail required to fill the gaping maws of the next generation of consoles. With this in mind, the smart money will be on those artists who can overcome the stereotype and demonstrate a technical bias. The ability to code, if only in terms of MAXScript or shader languages like Nvidia's Cg, will mark you out from the rest.



How should budding artists present their portfolios to development studios, and what should be in them?

The presentation format really depends on the skills sets the artist brings with them and the job they're applying for. If they're applying for a job as a concept artist I'd expect to see some hand-drawn work with printouts of any digital painting. If they're applying for animation or CG work then I'd expect to see a DVD or video showreel. Again, the content is dependent on the job, but the things I look out for are good attention to detail with a good understanding of lighting theory and proportion.

What skills are really in demand right now?

With next-gen technologies just around the corner I think character building and animation is going to become even more prolific. The quality of characterisation in realtime CG is going to go right up, meaning the dev time for creation is going to be longer. I suspect overall dev timescales will remain the same, hence the need for more character/animation staff.

With some games leaning towards a more cinematic experience, I think there will be a call for more art directors and cinematographers. Whether we

can attract these skills externally or grow them from within the studios is a matter for debate.

What software experience is essential in a candidate?

The usual suspects – from this studio's perspective, anyway – Maya, Photoshop and Painter, but if a quality candidate turns up straight from art college there's always the training route.

So much game art is 3D, but what opportunities are there in 2D?

My team is split up into two segments, CG cinematic team and graphic design. I think the 2D and graphic design aspect of games is often either overlooked or not given the level of importance it deserves. Huge amounts of research is done on human/computer interaction and how it's represented. We as an industry need to think of more adventurous ways of relaying information to the user – thankfully, I work with a great graphic design team and we're looking at this now.

What effect does actual enthusiasm for games have on, first, getting a job, and then performing well in the work environment?

Enthusiasm is obviously a great motivational factor but I don't think you have to be 100 per cent into the

Q&A: Lee Carus

Sony Liverpool veteran, his most recent project being *Wipeout Pure*



overall project for you to be enthused about your personal responsibilities (although being into both would be ideal). Using *F1* as an example, I think a car modeller can take great pride in the quality of the geometry that they create without being a complete *F1* fan who never misses a race. The wide range of skills sets in the industry nowadays means that not everyone needs to be a gaming addict.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to a budding artist?

Really think about your portfolio content and format – are you 100 per cent happy with what you're presenting and the way you're presenting it? If not, think of your portfolio as a pet project and really spend some time on it.



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Profile: Producer

A catch-all term, the role of a producer is to be the oil that greases the wheels ensuring the best game is released in the time available

Role overview

Perhaps the view in which producers are generally held can be realised by Mel Brooks' film of the same name, in which the attempted tax loss production, *Springtime For Hitler*, becomes a huge hit despite their best efforts.

But maybe things are different in the theatre, because in the videogame industry producers are only ever blamed for destroying the vision of a perfect game, never for facilitating its success. Whether acting on behalf of the publisher or the developer, producers are the interface between those actually making the game and those hopefully helping them make the game. It's a pressured role, which can involve a huge range of tasks; from dealing with the lead programmer's inability to get out of bed before 11 o'clock in the morning to sweet-talking the publisher into pushing back a milestone.

And as the scale of game development itself has ballooned, so have the producer's activities. For this reason, the role is undergoing the same fragmentation as programmers and artists, with specialist creatives, managers, schedulers and technical advisers being bought into play alongside the usual hierarchy of executive and assistant producers. At least this means that life is seldom dull, and with the right level of expertise and balance between creativity and rigour the successful producer is one of the most sought-after individuals in the industry.

What's the first thing to understand about the producer's role?

People need to understand the difference between external and internal producers; they are vastly different jobs. Previously, as an internal producer [working on *Carve* for Argonaut] I was man-managing a team of 40 people. Now, as an external producer for SCi working with Pivotal Games, I don't manage anyone. So I think people interested in becoming a

disks and screenshots are completed in time to handling the outsourcing of assets such as cutscenes and art production as well as localisation tasks. I also arrange things such as focus testing sessions and classic schedule management tasks, although with external production it's more about the long-term picture rather than day-to-day issues. I visit the developer, usually about once a week, to talk through what they want to do and provide feedback from SCi.

"It's one of the those jobs which seems to be filled by people from a variety of backgrounds. Probably the bulk come from quality assurance"

producer have to consider what they want to do. The process of managing a team of people is often underestimated. Whereas, as an external producer, it's more like a consultancy role. You have more time to think about things, which is the point. The industry needs to change the job title, really, because 'producer' just doesn't cover it.

So what do you actually get up to?

My job spans everything from coordinating with the marketing product manager to make sure demo

How is the role of the game producer changing nowadays?

There are a lot of different approaches to the job, depending on where you work. For example, EA splits it between creative and scheduling, so its producers act like film directors while development directors handle the scheduling. There are also technical producers. There's one at Pivotal who works with the technical director, looking after scheduling and ensuring everyone is getting the right information, which is another big part of production.

Q&A: Caspar Field

External producer at SCi for Conflict: Global Terror



What are the steps to becoming a game producer?

It's one of the those jobs which seems to be filled by people from a variety of backgrounds. Probably the bulk come from quality assurance because they have been exposed to a lot of the problems producers handle. Also, as a senior QA manager, you're probably overseeing a team of a dozen people, and hence already understand what makes projects hard and easy. So if you do well there, you'd probably get moved into an assistant producer role. There's increasing numbers of MA and MBA courses in digital media production too, so hopefully we'll see people coming into the industry with a more structured view.





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Profile: Programmer

Sitting at the heart of the development process, the programmer remains the knife-edge upon which great games are won and lost

Role overview

The position of the programmer is probably the archetypal one in game development. After all, this is the role where the arcane symbology of computer languages wrap around art and audio assets, converting them into something that can be understood by a small piece of silicon to create a moving, breathing virtual world. In many ways it's a magical process, although the long-cherished view of the lone coder as a controlling Merlin or Gandalf figure of power is over, if it even ever existed. Which is a good thing, of course, as can be proved by various urban myths. A favourite concerns the programmer who, as well as writing a cutting-edge game engine, decided to learn Japanese. As a result he wrote his comments in Japanese, which caused more than a few problems for his studio when he departed halfway through the project.

Now, however, with a game typically consisting of a million-odd lines of code, collaboration is most definitely the name of the programming game. Some studios even employ techniques such as peer programming or extreme programming to ensure the highest standards are maintained. And thanks to the widespread adoption of middleware, other changes have seen a new focus on coders who can make sure a range of thirdparty tools can pass data to each other.

So how did you become a technical director?

My career path is pretty normal, I think. From a young age I always wanted to be involved with games, so I started doing demos on the Atari ST, and a bit of hacking – tsk, naughty! I started a computer science course, but dropped out of it because they tried to teach me COBOL [a corporate programming language]. I got my first job in the industry through a friend who introduced me to the owner of a small codeshop, and from there I gradually moved from being programmer to senior programmer to lead programmer to technical director.

How is being a TD different?

The most striking change is my main work application is now Outlook not

as well as making sure our programmers are setting their sights high and collaborating together to deliver fantastic games. But the most satisfying aspect of my job has been seeing the number of late nights and weekends we work drop thanks to the software development processes we've put in place.

What are the qualities that make a good coder?

I think it's someone who knows when to ask for help, can tell when something is finished, has an eye for detail and most of all can remain passionate about their game when the shit hits the fan.

How has the role changed since you've been in the industry?

"There are some good game technology courses available, but the bottom line is you have to have at least two years' experience using C++"

Visual Studio. The job is about talking to people and writing reports, not coding. Typically, I'll arrive, check my emails and then do the rounds talking to various producers and the lead programmers on the project to find out if any issues have arisen. Then it might be a meeting to discuss planning a potential new project or meeting with a visiting publisher to show them our technology or original projects. After lunch, I might be carrying out a programmer appraisal and hassling the leads to do their chores, which are things like updating the project management system and carrying out code reviews.

Considering you don't code any more, does the job still excite you?

On a coding level, it's great to be able to make a difference to the quality of the code we write in the studio. I also get involved in shaping the development of our new technologies,



Larger studios develop in-house production tools (as is the case with Climax, whose Tomcat suite is pictured): this is work for senior programmers

Q&A: Chris Keegan

Technical director at Climax's Action Studio



you enjoy, and to have done some research into it while you're studying. I'd advise people to make a demo in that area to send to publishers and developers along with the source code and your CV. But don't bite off more than you can chew.

There's been a big shift in the level of required skills in areas such as software engineering and 3D maths. The rise of C++ has put pressure on software engineering skills. It's given people a lot of rope to hang themselves with and created plenty of arguments. I still see arguments between programmers about the number of clock cycles that virtual functions cost. Also, with the increasing processing power available on modern PCs and consoles comes a concomitant increase in the complexity of the physics, artificial intelligence and rendering systems. This has forced lead programmers to specialise.

Would you hire graduates into such specialised positions?

If I'm looking for, say, an entry-level physics programmer, I would look for a graduate with appropriate qualifications or an in-house programmer who's looking to specialise in that area.

So what advice would you give to any aspiring game coders?

Despite my experience, you have to go to university. There are some good game technology courses available, but the bottom line is you have to have at least two years' experience using C++ and be able to understand assembly language. Back it up with good maths skills. It's also useful to have figured out a particular area of games development



Which areas do you think are good ones to research?

For the next generation of hardware the difficult stuff is going to be in physics and artificial intelligence. There's a lot of processing power available and we'll need great talent to get the best out of it.

What general skills would you look for in a graduate programmer?

I look for strong object-oriented design skills, good experience using C++ and a knowledge of basic 3D maths. As well as a passion for games, of course.

What do you think is the biggest surprise for coders coming into game development?

I think this is the case for all disciplines entering the industry, not just

programmers, but making games is a long and arduous process. Sitting around and playing games is not something we generally do on a day-to-day basis. Equally, not all of the jobs associated with building games are exciting. But there is an upside – the pace of change, especially on the technology side, is extremely rapid, so you're always learning something new.


What work are you currently involved with, specifically?

I can't say too much about it, but at the moment we're developing the technology for a next-generation title. It's an exciting task, evolving existing technologies at the same time as coming up with radical new ways to get content into games.



The next generation of consoles and PC hardware will require coding flair to get the most evocative imagery to the screen, but the most important programming challenges right now concern AI and physics



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Profile: Journalist

Words and pictures – journalists provide the base materials for virtually all gaming publications, both online and off

Role overview

Game journalists, at the typical entry level of staff writer, are expected to provide copy for all sections of a magazine – or website – including news items, review and preview coverage, features and game walkthroughs. Magazine staff writers are usually required by contract to produce around 20 pages of copy per issue. Most game mags are scheduled to produce 13 issues per year, meaning that a number of issues will become three-week crunches. Overtime is often required, and lots of it, throughout each issue's cycle, depending on circumstances.

As well as producing copy, staff writers are required to take their own screenshots to accompany their words – captured via a PC, and often taken from 'debug' machines capable of playing unfinished code – as well as write related captions and decide on the structure and content of the boxouts that accompany the body of a review/preview. Due to the time pressures under which magazines operate, sizeable chunks of them are produced to ready-made templates, especially review and preview content, but aren't immune to bespoke changes as required by the writer and then discussed with the art department.

Staff writers are also expected to attend press trips, in-office presentations and launch events, fully aware of the fact that their behaviour is representative of their magazine, as much to cultivate relationships with publishers and developers as acquire the content for the magazine.

How did you get into the job, and how has your career turned out?

I'd spent six years at Cardiff University studying maths, and working through two degrees, when I decided that I'd like to do it. I'd always been heavily into games, and during my final two years at university I'd gotten involved with the student newspaper, producing a videogame section each week, and it was something that I began enjoying more than my academics. So I applied to a number of magazines, and ended up becoming a staff writer on *Official Xbox Magazine* at its launch. Two years – and various roles across a number of Xbox publications – later, I left the company and edited Teletext's game section, *GameCentral*. It was an excellent but relentless position, with zero publisher pressure but little room for a decent holiday, and after eight months on GC I put myself out to pasture as a full-time freelance writer.

As the cliché goes, there's no recognised qualification for games writing, but there are obvious capabilities that are recommended, such as the ability to articulate your opinions concisely and coherently, and really stick your knife into a game's lungs; by taking on such a role, you're assuming that you're clear-headed and knowledgeable enough to have an opinion that counts above most others. You'll also need to be able to work to high-pressure deadlines, and have enough of a love of games to not get sick of them after stuffing your mouth with so many in a short space of time.

What are the realistic prospects for a staff writer?

After a year or so, it's likely you'll be promoted to section editor, a role with

Q&A: Steven Bailey Freelance videogame journalist



less writing and more organising of the magazine's operations. That's the workload trend as you head up the career ladder within a magazine, really. It's also common for people to move from magazines into publishing or development, but aside from gathering useful contacts and developing more general workplace skills, it's not a springboard towards much else.

What don't they tell you at the job interview?

Journalists are often seen as one of two extreme stereotypes – the press-trip jolly-junkie who's only in it for the fact that you get to live and act like a student and pass it off as a job, and the cynical burnout who feels crushed by the short-term goals of magazine publishing but refuses to leave. This is something that, with few exceptions, is rubbish. You'll soon be deciding for yourself, and splitting them into your own categories of lovely people, vile idiots and everything in between, and it's something that applies across all aspects of the magazine world.

Press trips, again, are just as mixed; some are useful, eye-opening and rewarding, even if they're just a train ride up the country. Others are

an ever-present pressure: nobody has reconciled the fact that games are continually getting larger, longer and more complex. Nobody has added extra hours on to your working day, so the onus is on you to get things done in the required timeframe, however you do it.

The pay is never great, though, and anyone with serious thoughts of seeing

"Nobody has added extra hours on to your day, so the onus is on you to get things done in the required timeframe, however you do it"

legendary wastes of time and money, staged in the hope that a free skidoo ride down the side of the Eiffel Tower into a vat of molten ivory will somehow encourage you to give *Tom Clancy's Grand Theft Halo: WWE Vs Loud Cars* a higher mark. But, of course, they can still be masses of fun.

Overtime, as per contract, usually states that you work the 'necessary' extra hours, within reason, to get each issue finished. The fact that nobody ever defines this is what makes it such

writing about games as a career should think very long and very hard about it; while there's decent money to be earned in the magazine business, writers – who operate at the lowest level in its structure – rarely see it.

Also, be ready to be shocked by just how small a world the UK games industry is. You'll need the ability to store dozens of terabytes of gossip; it's the most potent currency next to ad revenues. And don't be surprised to see still-warm grudges and spats going on



Web contributions and student papers are good practice for young hacks, and can be used on a CV



in all corners that will be around for longer than the sun.

What are the highlights of the job?

Obviously, there's the satisfaction and catharsis of actually getting to write about games, and of informing and entertaining your readers. The tone of your required output varies from magazine to magazine, so be sure that you're comfortable with a certain house style before applying. And, while there's more to working on a magazine than just playing games, there will be precious moments when you're sat playing something that you've been looking forward to, having an excellent time, and calling it work.

There's the chance to see and play a wealth of games, both in their formative stages and just as they're completed, and meet their creators. And how about all those free games, eh? Well, forget about them. They'll just go straight to the editor. Still, you can always raid the games cupboard to borrow yourself happy for a weekend.

Make sure you bring along some

kind of competitive streak, too – most magazines spend their lunchtimes yelling and cursing their way through heated multiplayer sessions on games like *PES*. During my time on *Official Xbox Magazine*, Jon [Attaway, OXM's other staff writer] and I figured out that we'd put in some 1,500 hours of multiplayer *Halo* during lunch and after work. It's something that, in retrospect, was an incredible amount of fun.

So, how about life as a freelancer?

It's unpredictable and intense, and requires as much nepotism as flexibility and discipline. A wide range of contacts is essential, but you're often able to work how and when you like. I'm conscious, however, of the fact that I may wake up one day and despise my work; my time at university is a safety net that'll allow me to move into other jobs without resorting to the minimum wage in an office that doubles as a slow-motion graveyard. To me, it's an important part of freelancing, and means not having to pounce on every commission that comes my way.



Fanzines are also useful experience, while internet communities are a common place to get your views aired and to gather feedback on your writing ability



DEEP SILVER
In association with Deep Silver, a division of KOCH Media

Profile: Community manager

Looking after your players is a vital task for developers of online games

Overview

For years, QA has been seen as the back door into the games industry. The growth in online gaming has changed that, however, making the roles of game master and community manager some of the most viable ways of breaking into games.

Routes in can be as simple as getting there early – join up to official forums, volunteer for beta tests and prove yourself to be dedicated, level-headed and a good communicator. Many games like the upcoming *Guild Wars* have taken on staff from players of the early betas, based on their enthusiasm and concise and constructive feedback. A good fansite can be another way to get yourself noticed, and to prove your in-depth knowledge of a game and your rapport with its players.

The job will require you to absorb vast quantities of information. Being the public face of a game for many of its players means you need to be on top of every aspect of the project and be able to deal with sometimes repetitive and hostile complaints with positivity and charm.

As more and more games move online, and establish more and more elaborate communities, the need for skilled staff to act as intermediaries between players and developers is only going to increase. Getting involved at the heart of a major gaming project has rarely been so accessible.

How does your job work on a day-to-day basis?

I spend much of my time gathering feedback through reading forums, emails and websites, making sure to stay on top of important matters in the community. Another big portion of my time goes into staying on top of information inside the company.

My main responsibilities include having to know virtually everything that happens in the player community, keeping the other teams informed about both the good and the bad, and highlighting important concerns. Furthermore, I need to stay updated on all things that might affect the community both on a short- and long-term basis and participate in planning and coordinating any communication about these. It's also important to be very visible to the players, to show that we're listening and that we're on the same team.

How did you get started?

I started as a GM with another MMO developer in 2001 after being an active beta tester. Soon after being hired I joined their community team where I spent the next three-and-a-half years working closely with other community representatives, developers, support staff, marketing, and PR.

Do you think it's a good way into the videogame industry?

Yes, absolutely. You can't really get a degree in GM or community work. For those with specialist skills it can also be

a stepping stone to other positions, and the close and daily contact with the players is a very valuable experience to bring with you in such cases.

What are the longer-term career possibilities for GMs?

Following the direct path upwards, a GM can attain a senior GM or lead GM position, meaning more responsibility and the possibility to prove oneself as an organisational and management asset to the company. A community manager (CM) may have advanced from a position as assistant CM or community representative.

Continuing upwards generally means moving into the business management level or extending one's area of responsibility. There's also the possibility to move on to other positions based on skills and experience.

What is the most rewarding aspect?

Seeing the community thrive and respond positively to what we are doing is the greatest reward of them all. That is what the job is all about. Working with a huge number of highly skilled, creative and professional individuals is very inspiring and gives confidence when responding to player concerns.

What about the most annoying?

That is definitely not having time to play the game as much as I like. Community management isn't just a day job, and I can't always sit back and be 'just a player' for the evening. Also, I miss some of the

Q&A: Thomas Johnsen Community manager for the *World Of Warcraft* community in Europe



mystery around the content and the excitement of discovering something completely new.

Is it a well-paid job?

To me, it's a combination of work and hobby, but I make sure to keep work and playing the game separated. It is a somewhat tricky and sometimes tough job, though, and you must feel appreciated to do it well. However, that depends on far more important things than the salary.

What's the most valuable kind of experience to have?

Being a player, knowing what it's like to be on the other side. It's very important to have compassion for the players, and equally important to be able to see through the sometimes less than diplomatic feedback to find the true message. Conveniently, this experience can be – and should be – attained and maintained outside of work hours too.





DEEP SILVER

In association with Deep Silver, a division of KOCH Media

Profile: Localisation technician

One of the newer roles in the industry, localisation mixes language skills with the traditional disciplines of the tester

Role overview

While it would be a fallacy to suggest the localisation of games isn't about the translation of assets, this is really only the first step in getting a game ready for release in another language. Of course, the sheer amount of in-game text, manuals and websites that need to be translated, considering games released in Europe usually require at least French, German, Italian and Spanish versions, creates enough scheduling and manpower problems. And that's not to forget issues such as getting audio files re-recorded by suitable local talent. What's more difficult, however, is ensuring that the finished translations are meaningful, both in the culture of the new language as well as the culture of the gamer. With the bulk of translation being carried out by academically trained linguists, who are unlikely to be committed gamers, this is often the biggest challenge.

It's for this reason the role of localisation tester has evolved. As with common-or-garden testers, who ensure a game is free of bugs, so the localisation tester plays games checking the quality and appropriateness of any translations. In this way, localisation is best seen as a part of the general quality assurance process games need to go through rather than a separate entity. So, as with all testing, the requisite skills are the ability to work in a team and a love of gaming, plus the ability to speak another language.



What do you actually do? Basically, I'm a client-facing project manager, so I handle all of the translation of files, print materials, audio assets, websites – anything to do with the production/development of a game. Well, that's half my job. I also have a project management side in quality assurance, so I get involved in localisation QA, functionality QA and the scheduling of testing.

course and started out in advertising and publishing with Dixons and Mothercare. After that, I decided I wanted to be in games and saw an advert for a localisation tester at Interplay. One of my A-levels was French so I became a language tester and learned the ropes. Then I was offered a job at Lego as localisation coordinator. I also moved into audio production then, which is how I learned my project management

"I can't imagine doing anything else because I love games. I'm not a suit-type person either so I don't think I could have worked in a bank"

Why is it a rewarding role?

I can't imagine doing anything else because I love games. Being able to see a game before it's released is pretty cool. I'm not a suit-type person either so I don't think I could have worked in a bank. Also my role is still fairly hands on. I don't want to get more managerial because I love the day-to-day contact and all the technicalities.

Have you always wanted to work in games?

I did a media and radio production

skills. After Lego, I was Eidos' localisation manager.

What have you worked on recently?

I've been doing a lot of GBA work, plus an in-game translation for a PSP game, a website translation and also some mobile phone projects. In terms of titles, I handled the translation of *Sid Meier's Pirates!* which was really enjoyable. I was Atari's main contact at Babel so I got a broad overview of the game. We did French, German, Italian and Spanish versions. I also worked on

Q&A: Emma Timms

Project manager at outsourcing specialist Babel Media



functionality testing for *Championship Manager*, which involved handling a team of 30 functionality testers at Babel as well as a hit-squad working on site at Eidos.

What skills should you have if you want to work in this area?

Having a background in media really helps. It is quite tricky getting into games, but keep trying; look for adverts, tout your CV to games companies and try to get a foot in the door with work experience. Of course, if you definitely want to go into localisation, it would be useful to have language qualifications or have studied translation.



DEEP SILVER
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Profile: Tester

The last line of defence before release to the paying public, being a tester can a dirty job, but it's a great way to start

Role overview

The most obvious entry-level position in the industry, the only qualification you need to become a tester is to love games. But maybe that's better explained as you should really, *really* love games because, as a tester, you'll have to complete whatever's put in front of you, time and time again, until you wish you'd never played a game ever. Which, in a circular sense, is why testing has proved to be such a good entry into the industry. If you can excel in a role that often sucks the enjoyment out of playing games, you can handle pretty much anything thrown at you. Of course, there are other reasons for its reputation as a breeding ground for talent. Assuming you can turn up on time and do the tasks put in front of you, it won't be long before you're managing a team and making sure they get their work completed to a schedule, too. You also get to learn how the cycle of development works (or doesn't), as well as understanding the basic tools and technologies used to create a game. Getting a degree will help your progression, though, because very few people actually want to be testers forever.

What's the best way of getting a foot in the door?

I was really fortunate as I just fell into the industry, really. I have a good friend who is a coder here at Climax; he was able to get me an interview very quickly and it all fell into place from there. For those who want to get into testing without friends on the inside it's getting considerably more difficult nowadays. If you look around at the jobs available and accompanying descriptions, you will increasingly see the term 'quality assurance' (QA). Videogame companies are increasingly looking for experience and the ability for applicants to show they can hit the ground running. It's the age-old vicious circle of needing experience, but how can you get it if no one will give you a try? The best way is beta testing. There are many opportunities for people to test products for companies in the beta stage. This is often voluntary, but gives a good opportunity to show desire as well as gaining precious experience.

How different is the reality of testing from the perception of it?

The reality is a far cry from the fantasy. You hear it so often: "Wow, You play games for a living! That must be so cool to just sit there and play games." Yes, it is a very cool job. No, it is not just sitting for eight hours playing your favourite title and getting paid for it. Often, the title you're working on is not in a genre you would choose if you were playing games at home.

Sometimes you can be playing the same game over and over for 40+ hours a week for months on end. And then there is the infamous crunch period. It is not unheard of for a single working 'day' to last for up to 38 hours. QA is a great way into the industry and a very enjoyable job, but if you think you're in for a cushy ride... you're in for a big shock!

Where can testing lead?

Testing can lead pretty much anywhere you want, but the most obvious are design, QA lead or manager or even producer. The skills you pick up suit these roles very well, as you develop an excellent sense of what works in terms of balancing and gameplay. You develop communication skills in your bug reporting and in dealing with the production team and external test teams. You tend to get a good knowledge of the kind of thing that can go wrong. All of these things can lead to roles in management or design.

What's so good about the job?

As much as it may be a far cry from reality to fantasy, in truth the reality is still pretty good. You get an enormous sense of achievement when you see the project finished. The games industry is also the most unusual place to work and is very relaxed.

And the bad?

The worst parts are sometimes the unsociable, long hours and the

Q&A: Barry Martin

Lead game tester at Climax



monotony. And being on the same project for months on end can mean that, even if you love the title you're working on, it can soon get tedious and you never want to play it again.

What makes a good tester?

To be a good tester you will need to be the sort of person who can pay attention to detail and work well within a team, often under pressure to meet deadlines. You need excellent communication skills for both your bug reporting and for dealing with other members of the QA team, production team and management. It helps too if you are passionate about games and have a real sense of what makes a good game but what also can be a game's weakness.

What's the single best piece of advice you could give someone looking to get a job as a tester?

Be prepared to work hard.





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University courses

There's certainly plenty of choice, both in the terms of under- and post-graduate game courses, but which one is right for you?

It's a mark of the popularity of videogames in all aspects of life that such a range of game-related university courses is now available. And this selection doesn't take into account many more courses that are run in standard subjects such as computer science, physics, mathematics, fine art and animation, which may also provide an excellent grounding for the aspiring developer.

Indeed, there are some within the industry who suggest that they'd prefer to employ a graduate with a more straightforward degree from a good university than one of the 'new-fangled' varieties. Considering the rapid explosion in game-related courses, there is some truth in the argument. Just because a course is called The Best Computer Games Course In The World Ever™ doesn't mean it's telling the truth. So plenty of research is definitely in order – both in terms of making sure the course is covering the subjects you're interested in, as well as in a location in which you'll enjoy studying and living. But the bottom line is, no matter what a course is called, if it doesn't provide a good fundamental knowledge of your chosen area of expertise, in the eyes of the industry your degree won't be worth the paper is given to you on come graduation day.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERTAY DUNDEE

Bell Street, Dundee, DD1 1HG
01382 308000
www.abertay.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Dr Colin Fraser,
c.fraser@abertay.ac.uk

GAME PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT, BA

code: G452
duration: Four years full-time
details: Designed to provide the skills a producer needs, this course will give you an understanding of the game production process and its business context. In the final year you will lead a small development team with a remit to produce a significant new media product.

COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY, BSC

code: G470
duration: Four years full-time
details: Aimed at programmers, this course will stretch you in mathematics, realtime graphics and games console programming. There is also freedom to take additional modules such as marketing, Japanese studies and audio.

COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY, MSC

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: This course is for graduates with experience in computer programming and a grounding in mathematics. They will design a full game and, in a team, produce a working prototype game level.

BOLTON UNIVERSITY



The University of Bolton,
Deane Road, Bolton, BL3 5AB
01204 900600
www.bolton.ac.uk
Admissions contact: cet@bolton.
ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: G450/G451
duration: Three/four years full-time
details: With a core of C/C++ programming for PCs and consoles, this course covers applied physics, AI, sound and music as well as components of game design, development, production, finance and distribution process.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR COMPUTER ANIMATION

Bournemouth University
Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset,
BH12 5BB
01202 524111
http://ncca.bournemouth.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
everitts@bournemouth.ac.uk

COMPUTER VISUALISATION AND ANIMATION, BA

code: W280
duration: Three years full-time
details: This programme recognises the requirement of aesthetic practice with technical disciplines, enabling students to become well rounded professionals.

COMPUTER ANIMATION, MSC

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: The aim of this course is to produce technical directors who can combine artistic sensibilities, with problem solving and technical skills. Areas of study include computer graphics techniques, programming for graphics and film-making.

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

Preston, United Kingdom, PR1 2HE
01772 201201
www.uclan.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
cenquiries@uclan.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: G451
duration: Three years full-time
details: As part of the department of computing, this course is designed for applicants looking to develop software implementation skills using computer graphics and games development environments such as 3ds max.

GAMES DESIGN, BA

code: WG42
duration: Three years full-time
details: Part of the department of design, this course is rooted in creative thinking and suited to those wishing to become involved in visualisation, conceptual design, animation and digital modelling within the games development industry.

CITY UNIVERSITY

Northampton Square, London
EC1V 0HB
020 7040 5060
www.city.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
ugenquire@soi.city.ac.uk

COMPUTER SCIENCE WITH GAMES TECHNOLOGY, BSC

code: G490
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: The core of the degree is programming-oriented computer science, in addition to which you will study advanced topics on the theory, design and, most importantly, the building of games.

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY



Priory Street
Coventry CV1 5FB
024 7688 8672
www.coventry.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admissions.mis@coventry.ac.uk

GAMES TECHNOLOGY BSC

code: G454
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This course will equip you to design, build and market videogames and to apply the knowledge gained in many areas of advanced computer science. In addition, programming skills will be developed to a high level.

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

Kedleston Road, Derby, DE22 1GB
01332 590500
www.derby.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
enquiries-admissions@derby.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES PROGRAMMING, BSC

code: G450
duration: Four years full-time, five years part-time
details: The course will equip you for work in the games industry in roles such as gameplay programmer, tools developer and AI programmer and includes modules such as software engineering, online gaming and graphics.

UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

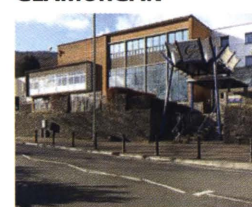


Wivenhoe Park, Colchester,
CO4 3SQ
01206 873333
www.essex.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admit@essex.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES AND INTERNET TECHNOLOGY, BENG

code: G450
duration: Three years full-time
details: A technical degree, this course focuses on the mathematical and physics principles that underlie videogames and the Internet and teaches the principles of simulation and internet co-ordination.

UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN



Pontypridd, Wales, CF37 1DL
01443 480 480
www.glam.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
enquiries@glam.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: GG46
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: The course is designed to produce computer graduates with the core computer skills required by the videogames industry. These include coding from specification, working as part of a team and understanding the fundamentals of computer hardware.

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

70 Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow,
G4 0BA
0141 331 3000
www.gcal.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Brian Shields,
b.shields@gcal.ac.uk

GAMES TECHNOLOGY, MSC

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: The aim of the programme is to provide students with the theoretical and the practical skills necessary to pursue a career in game design and programming. It is concerned with all aspects of the development, design, and implementation of of videogame production.



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University courses (contd)

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

Old Royal Naval College, Park Row,
Greenwich, London, SE10 9LS
020 8331 8000
www.gre.ac.uk
Email:
courseinfo@greenwich.ac.uk

COMPUTING WITH GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: G4G6
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This course helps you to understand the fundamentals of game development and the production of game media elements. You'll also develop skills in related technologies such as animation, virtual reality and audio-visual production techniques.

UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD



Queensgate, Huddersfield,
HD1 3DH
01484 422288
www.hud.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
newmedia@hud.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES PROGRAMMING, BSC

code: G602
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Teaching software development skills, primarily for PC, Xbox, and PlayStation2. Each year features a large games development project to help you integrate skills from other core modules and also covers business development and marketing.

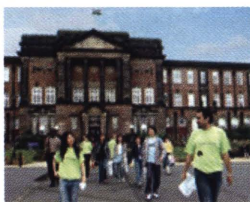
UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Hull, HU6 7RX
01482 346311
www.hull.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admissions@dcs.hull.ac.uk

GAMES PROGRAMMING, MSC

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: The aims of the MSc are to provide you with a broad education in videogame design, development and technology, with a special emphasis on the programming of videogames and the theoretical and creative aspects of computing.

LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY



Civic Quarter, Leeds, LS1 3HE
www.lmu.ac.uk
0113 283 2600
Admissions contact: by phone

GAMES DESIGN, BSC

code: GW42
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Students will gain an understanding of the technological basis of game design as well as exploring content generation tools and techniques such as 3D modelling and animation, audio and project management.

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

Brayford Pool Lincoln LN6 7TS
01522 882000
www.lincoln.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
enquiries@lincoln.ac.uk

GAMES COMPUTING, BSC/MCOMP

code: G401
duration: Three years full-time, four years for MComp
details: This course has a particular emphasis on game programming, game design, 3D modelling and animation. The MComp programme provides an additional year of specialised study and in-depth project work leading to a Masters award.

GAMES DESIGN, BA

code: W280K
duration: Three years full-time
details: Play and interaction are key words for this course which focuses on the visual design, rather than the technology, of videogames, exploring the notion of play in interactive digital media on all platforms, within a conceptual framework of gaming/playing.

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Egerton Court, 2 Rodney Street,
Liverpool, L3 5UX
0151 231 2121
www.livjm.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
recruitment@livjm.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY, BSC

code: G450
duration: Four years sandwich
details: Providing you with a comprehensive education in aspects of videogames design, the main themes of this course are game architecture and design, software development, computer systems and multimedia authoring and development.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DIGITAL CONTENT

Liverpool John Moores University
2nd Floor, Faraday House, Edge Lane, Liverpool, L7 9NW
0151 231 4777
www.icdc.org.uk
Admissions contact:
Andy Mccloughlin.
a.mccloughlin@livjm.ac.uk

DIGITAL GAMES, MA

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: With a focus on combining technical, design and artistic skills with creativity and research, you'll be able to produce an innovative portfolio of work. This course also develops a critical awareness of the culture issues of the digital games industry.

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY



31 Jewry Street, London, EC3N 2EY
020 7423 0000
www.londonmet.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admissions@londonmet.ac.uk

COMPUTER VISUALISATION AND GAMES, BSC

code: G451
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Designed to meet the needs of students who wish to specialise in computer graphics and imaging, this course teaches the fundamentals of constructing visualisation systems and application through the use of modern systems.

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

North London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South, London,
N11 1QS
020 8411 5555
www.mdx.ac.uk
Admissions contact: 020 8411 5898

GAMES DESIGN, BA

code: W243
duration: Three years full-time, five years part-time
details: The emphasis of this course is gaining an in-depth and critical knowledge of games, as well as designing original games whether electronic, traditional, fantasy, strategy, educational, media, activity-based, role-play and board games.

LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY



103 Borough Road, London,
SE1 0AA
020 7928 8989
www.lsbu.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
enquiry@lsbu.ac.uk

GAME CULTURES, BSC

code: G451
duration: Three years full-time
details: Offering a practical approach to games production in writing, design, programming and prototyping, this course also provides critical analysis of videogame artifacts based in cultural and media studies.

UNIVERSITY OF LUTON



Park Square, Luton, Bedfordshire,
LU1 3JU
01582 734111
www.luton.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admissions@luton.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: G453
duration: Three years full-time
details: This course is designed to build the programming skills required to create new games, implement a game by writing code from scratch, interpret existing code for a game and integrate different game technologies

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

All Saints Building, All Saints,
Manchester, M15 6BH
0161 247 2000
www.mmu.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
enquiries@mmu.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY, BSC

code: GG46
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This course covers a range of subjects from games programming to design, mathematics for graphics, data structures and the fundamentals of artificial intelligence, equipping you to work in computer visualisation and animation development roles.

UNIVERSITY OF WALES, NEWPORT



Caeleion Campus, PO Box 101,
Newport, South Wales, NP18 3YH
01633 432432
www.newport.ac.uk
Admissions contact:
admissions@newport.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAME DESIGN, BA

code: WGF4
duration: Three years full-time
details: This programme builds on core animation skills and concepts of narrative and character development, enabling you to engage with conceptual practice and content development within a larger production framework.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: GG47
duration: Three years full-time
details: This course has three complementary themes from basic programming and systems analysis, to the techniques and implementation of artificial intelligence and the wider issues of games development.

NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY

Elison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST
0191 232 6002
www.northumbria.ac.uk
Admissions contact: et.admissions@northumbria.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES SOFTWARE ENGINEERING, BSC

code: G453
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: The degree combines elements of computer programming and mathematical disciplines with an exploration of games design as well as appreciation of software design and management processes.

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY



Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU
0115 941 8418
www.ntu.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Dr John Bland, john.bland@ntu.ac.uk

COMPUTER SCIENCE (GAMES TECHNOLOGY), BSC

code: G440
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This course is designed to provide a computer science degree with an emphasis on games programming techniques. Graduates will gain the skills required to design and implement systems involving graphics, artificial intelligence and games technology.

UNIVERSITY OF PAISLEY

Paisley, Scotland, UK, PA1 2BE
0141 848 3000
www.paisley.ac.uk
Admissions contact: uni-direct@paisley.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY, BSC

code: G451
duration: Four years full-time, five years sandwich
details: Integral to this course is a focus on the technology used in the development of videogames. Topics covered range from programming, 3D modelling and animation to the human-computer interface and cognitive psychology.

UNIVERSITY OF Salford



Salford, Greater Manchester, M5 4WT
0161 295 5000
www.salford.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Roy Humphrey, r.humphrey@salford.ac.uk

COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES, BSC

code: G470
duration: Three years full-time
details: Designed to prepare you for the role of game producer, this course covers subjects from programming and project management to design, audio development, art and graphics and the history and analysis of games.

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

City Campus, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB
0114 225 5555
www.shu.ac.uk
Admissions contact: admissions@shu.ac.uk

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT (GAMES)

code: G611
duration: Four years sandwich
details: With a focus on software engineering, this course involves practical software production and project management, as well as developing the creative and practical skills needed for building playable and interesting software.

STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

College Road, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 2DE
01782 29400
www.staffs.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Maureen Hindhaugh, fcet@staffs.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN

code: H132
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This course is about creating designs for games, including level design. You will, in the process, create 3D models and animations in 3ds max and Maya as well as gain a basic knowledge of games engines and physics.

COMPUTER GAMES PROGRAMMING, BSC

code: GGK6
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Running concurrent with the general computer science course, the focus of this course is gaining the skills necessary to transform a design into a finished game running on a specific hardware platform.

THE SURREY INSTITUTE OF ART & DESIGN



Farnham Campus, Falkner Road, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7DS
01252 722441
www.surrart.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Nick Gorse, ngorse@surrart.ac.uk

DIGITAL GAMES DESIGN, MA

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time
details: This course encompasses three strands: a taught masterclass of game design and development; the analysis of current industry output and future trends; and portfolio development including at least one playable game prototype.

SWANSEA INSTITUTE

Mount Pleasant, Swansea, SA1 6ED
01792 481000
www.sihe.ac.uk
Admissions contact: Gordon Dickers, gordon.dickers@sihe.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES DEVELOPMENT, BSC

code: H674
duration: Three years full-time
details: Mixing traditional software development skills, alongside those required for creative games creation, this course provides the opportunity for students to use their skills to develop sophisticated games.

UNIVERSITY OF TEESIDE



Middlesbrough, Tees Valley, TS1 3BA
01642 218121
www.tees.ac.uk
Admissions contact: hotline@tees.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES SCIENCE, BSC

code: G450
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This degree provides students with a well-rounded education in the technology, software development and techniques used in videogames. Emphasis is placed on developments in realtime graphics, simulation of physics and games AI.

COMPUTER GAMES PROGRAMMING, BSC

code: GGK6
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Designed with a games programming and production focus, this course starts with the fundamentals of computer programming, games and graphics hardware, also covering games programming, simulation, APIs and networks.

COMPUTER GAMES ART

code: W212
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: This degree focuses on a wide ranging and in-depth study of the creative, artistic, design and animation skills necessary in the production of art assets for games, such as advanced 3D modelling, texturing and lighting.

COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN

code: G470
duration: Three years full-time, four years sandwich
details: Starting with conceptual design, including story, character and visual design, further modules cover drawing, design and games history before branching out into the synthesis of creative art and technology and interface design.

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

309 Regent Street, London W1B 2UW
020 7911 5000
www.wmin.ac.uk
Admissions contact: cav-admissions@wmin.ac.uk

COMPUTER GAMES GRAPHICS, MSC

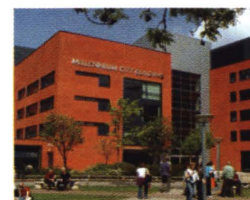
code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time, two years part-time
details: This course covers becoming a graphic artist in the games industry, covering characters and animation, interactive and 3D design plus digital representation.

COMPUTER GAMES PROGRAMMING, MSC

code: Apply direct
duration: One year full-time, two years part-time
details: This course is interested in vision and a creative approach to development, including the opportunity of new and untraditional platforms.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1SB
01902 321000
www.wlv.ac.uk
Admissions contact: enquiries@wlv.ac.uk



COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN, BA

code: W284
duration: Three years full-time, five/six years part-time
details: This course will give a thorough understanding of the games environment, building on time, space and movement in relation to interactive structures, games design and conventions and character development.

Developing games in New Zealand

Head to the southern hemisphere for a relaxed way of life, and to learn how to develop videogames too



For a bunch of guys who liked to play videogames, *Goliath*, a thirdperson, multiplayer PC game developed at Media Design School in Auckland, New Zealand, is a spectacular achievement.

Just 18 months ago, a group of programmers and artists came together under the guidance of international game experts, with the vision of creating an original game that is based upon life after the apocalypse.

Lead designer **Stephen Harris** describes the game concept as: "*Goliath* takes on the road warriors, in the style of *Mad Max*, and pits them in a battle of survival against the monolithic force of the Goliath Battle

For an industry that generates greater annual revenue than the entire Hollywood film industry, the jump into the world of games offered more than an alluring appeal, it presented the opportunity to combine their hobbies with a lucrative career.

The full *Goliath* project team are students studying an 18-month graduate programme in game development at Media Design School. The school, an industry-based specialist institute focusing on creative technologies, provides an industry-focused experience where inventive minds can experiment and push boundaries within an innovative education framework.

New Zealand's very buoyant employment market is a strong attraction for people looking to pursue a less demanding career and lifestyle

Tank. Life has become survival of the fittest, with fragmented communities of warriors battling over scarce resources and trying to guarantee their own survival. All sense of a common cause is lost as each community struggles for its own survival... that is, until the *Goliath* arrived."

These students, prior to leaving respectable careers in associated programming and design industries, had individually thrown caution to the wind to pursue lifelong ambitions to develop videogames for a living.

The latest and most relevant technical softwares are utilised to ensure graduates enter the industry with relevant hands-on knowledge and experience.

Although code warriors and artists work in collaboration, the course offers two clearly defined and segmented skills sets that allow students to specialise in either game programming or game art. Having students from these contrasting backgrounds on the same course allows the students to have more comprehensive knowledge



3D model making and rendering are part of the game development course at Media Design School, which offers the chance to work alongside other students following related creative disciplines



and experience to launch themselves into the gaming world.

The game art (content design) stream requires expert creative talent and artistic ability. Applicants come from backgrounds in graphics, art and multimedia. During the course they will learn 3D character modelling, rendering and animation as well as the creative and production processes involved in game design.

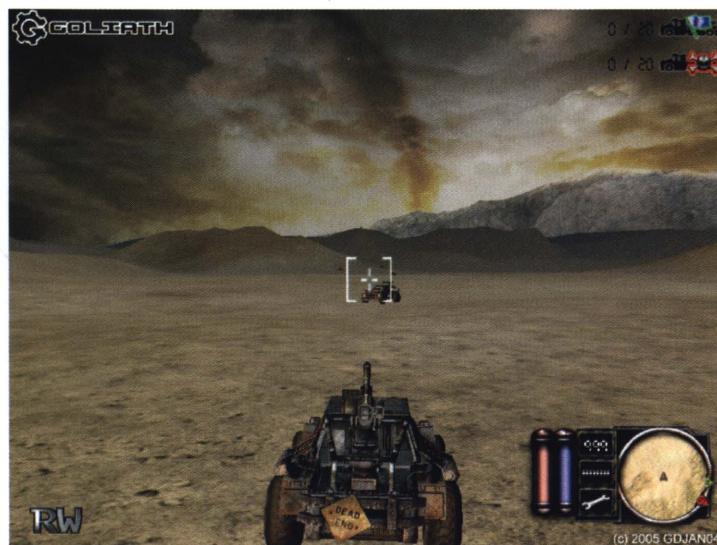
The programming of each individual game requires technical innovation, high-level analytical ability and mathematical skills. Applicants for the game programming stream will generally have previous qualifications in information technology, computer science or programming. On the course they will learn the technical side of game development including programming languages, physics and mechanics for games and artificial intelligence (AI).

The course is designed to replicate industry production practices and has

been designed by key industry personnel. The close industry ties allows graduates great opportunities to gain employment with prominent game development studios.

For international students, New Zealand has become a popular destination to gain work experience upon completion of their studies. The relaxed way of life, combined with New Zealand's very buoyant employment market (it has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world) is a strong attraction for people looking to pursue a less demanding career and lifestyle. All qualifications taught have been identified as occupational priorities in New Zealand, meaning there is an identified shortage of talent in these sectors – all good news if you are heading their way.

Media Design School welcomes international applicants for all eight qualifications offered by the school. Programme details can be found at www.mediadesign.school.nz



Goliath is a project designed and built by Media Design School students. The concept screenshot (left) was produced using Maya and Photoshop, while the game itself (above) was written in C++ and DirectX

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The Centre For Virtual Environments

Studying and researching interactive
3D systems at the University of Salford



The Centre For Virtual Environments, at the University of Salford, is a multi-disciplinary research centre that aims to further the technology and understanding of interactive 3D systems, and is acknowledged as a leading centre in the world for this activity. The CVE was established in 1994 and occupies a modern building on the edge of the main university campus into which an unprecedented range of equipment and resources has been installed to support the teaching, research and enterprise activities.

The courses are taught by research-leading academics and researchers who also supervise commercially led projects, and students get the chance to work on industrially relevant projects at the



There is increasing convergence between traditional VR technologies and emerging gaming systems

that are applicable to future videogame systems.

The primary research focus is the support of social human communication in an information space. The centre is pinioning the development of the next generation

"The virtual environments are not simulators – the use of realtime enables the viewer to control the movement and direction of the images"

cutting edge of research.

The centre is active in both research into the practice and technology of VR systems, and into the application of VR for a wide range of domains ranging from urban modeling and engineering through to intelligent agents and collaborative visual systems for communication. Increasingly, this is utilising videogame technology and developing systems

of communication systems where geographically disperse groups come together in a shared interactive information space. This has applications from networked gaming to collaborative engineering and tele-medicine. "This is a huge technological leap forward," explains **David Roberts**, a reader at the centre. "Collaborative virtual environments allow you to literally step



The current group project activity is directed at applying VR technologies in developing an interactive system for exploring emergency-service responses to large-scale disasters in a game-like environment

into someone else's world and share their experiences and visions."

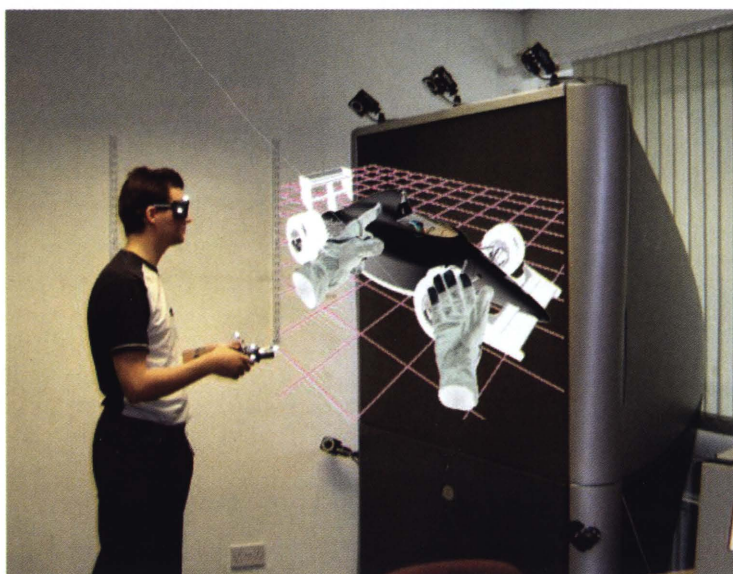
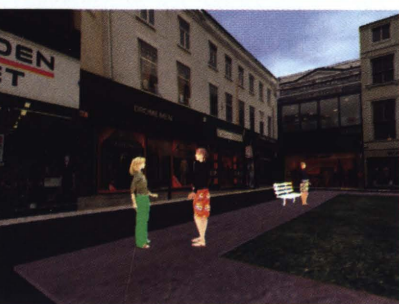
The CVE also has a commercial unit that aims to support local companies in developing VR systems and understanding the potential of these technologies. The Virtual Environment Technology Support (VETS) group has successfully worked with over 100 companies developing everything from large scale urban models to a parachute simulator for the 500-year-old designs of Leonardo da Vinci.

The CVE is a vibrant, exciting place to study. The technology and research is at the cutting edge of an extremely exciting field – and postgraduate students are an important part of the CVE's success.

The centre offers an MSc program that will equip participants with the skills needed to make a real impact in the field. This program is aimed at people wanting to find employment at a highly technical level developing collaborative and/or immersive virtual environments including engineering, medical and computer networked games.

There is also a doctoral program, where students will first take part in the MSc in Virtual Environments course at the centre. The final project in the MSc will lead into a full PhD program on the same subject. There are many successful PhD students researching at the centre. Working closely with the centre's academics, the field offers a great deal of opportunity for doctoral study.

In short, the CVE is a friendly dynamic place to study, offering a unique combination of resources and facilities that enables it to provide a well rounded, and commercially relevant MSc course with good success rates and employment prospects in the field. Many students have continued careers at the centre in both research and enterprise.



The courses' group projects aim to provide students with the opportunity to both manage their own personal work activity within a team environment and to develop skills in team management



University of Salford
A Greater Manchester University

MSc in Virtual Environments

Applications are invited for taught Masters Students at the internationally renowned Centre for Virtual Environments (CVE). Applicants should hold, or be expected to attain, a 2:1* or above in scientific, mathematic or computer science related disciplines.

The CVE is a unique facility, with the world's widest range of equipment and resources dedicated to the research and application of Virtual Environments. These are complemented by the Centre's balanced approach which integrates world class research and nationally recognised commercial enterprise to ensure that students not only have access to cutting edge technology, but also develop commercially relevant skills.

- Be part of a world class research team.
- Study in a unique, industrially focused environment.
- Work on industrially relevant, cutting edge research projects.
- Prepare yourself for a career at the forefront of visualisation and communication technology.
- Attain a commercially relevant qualification.
- Games, Medicine, Science, Engineering, Built Environment.

The MSc Virtual Environments course is carefully structured to develop the wide range of specialised skills necessary to apply interactive 3D technologies for Virtual Reality and Games.

Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3
Virtual Environment Technology	Populated Virtual	Dissertation
3D Development Techniques	Environments	(Industrial Research
Immersive Virtual Environments	Human Factors	Project)
Research Methods	3D Graphics	
	and Simulation	
	Group Project	

The Virtual Environments Technology Support (VETS) group, which currently works with over 100 UK companies, has the potential to assist dissertation level students with:-

- Part Funding of MSc
- Commercial Dissertation Projects
- Jobs and Funding for further research

For further information, please contact:

Dr Dave Roberts, Academic Director,
The Centre for Virtual Environments, Business House,
University of Salford, Salford, Greater Manchester, M5 4WT.

Email D.J.Roberts@salford.ac.uk Telephone +44 (0) 161 295 2916
Fax +44 (0) 161 295 2925 Web www.salford.ac.uk/cve

Please quote Reference No. 1549

* Other classifications will be considered on an individual basis

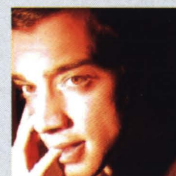




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Educating Lara

David Surman considers the rise of videogame-related higher education



There has been considerable growth in the number of universities offering study in games design. Courses ranging from traditional multimedia to AI to 'new media' have traded on the popularity of videogame culture to ensure the recruitment of students, and the emergence of courses exclusively aimed at games represents overdue recognition of this enthusiastic audience. While arguments for and against the validity of studying videogames occupy developers and academics, the desire to engage with game design at university is expressed by high enrolment figures.

While a minority of courses claim to offer a 'full' games design education, most recognise that it is unreasonable to expect students to acquire the full repertoire of skills in the three years of an undergraduate programme. Broadly speaking, the vast majority offer specialisation in one of two broad churches – artistry and programming. Under the banner of 'game artistry', game design, concept design, storyboarding, modelling, animation and level design are now covered across the UK and abroad. In addition, categories of programming, including software development, artificial intelligence and games physics, are found in specialist undergraduate courses.

The incorporation of game history and criticism into the syllabi of most undergraduate videogame courses (notably those dealing with artistry) helps to create a sense of historical and cultural awareness among students, developing knowledge of

past practices and potential futures. An introduction to the academic discipline of 'game studies' alongside practical skills provides an avenue for students with journalistic and academic ambitions to develop the necessary skills for their area.

For parents, the prospect of ushering their children into an expensive education system to study videogames may seem daunting. The industry is often characterised as ephemeral and ruthless by the press, but the same concerns surrounded the emergence of film, TV and animation courses in the past 30 years. While there is some truth to claims of a lack of job security in

gamer. This practice reduces innovation in commercial games to a piecemeal process of minor change. Innovative game designs often struggle to break the mass markets.

Three years of undergraduate study allow students to innovate and experiment with the medium while acquiring skills. The games industry needs to recognise the potential of such courses to foster students whose ideas and practices will form the basis of future games design.

In addition, the standardisation of practices and skills that comes with university accreditation offers games employers a clear picture of what to expect from the average CV.

A more widespread recognition of what game courses have to offer sends a positive message to those seeking to get into the industry

videogames, in recent years the industry has become increasingly aware of the need to standardise practices regarding working hours, production scheduling and employee benefits. All this adds up to a rosier image of games development as a place for opportunity and innovation – and is helping to secure videogames as a legitimate media industry.

There are various benefits to studying videogames, both for students and the industry at large. It is generally agreed that there is a lack of creative innovation in commercial games production. Strong titles are subject to imitation by others, who capitalise on the generic tastes and frugal eye of the contemporary

A more widespread recognition of what game courses have to offer sends a more positive message to those seeking to get into the industry, confronted by the paradox of needing three years' experience, but with no immediate means to get it.

As courses offering games study develop to offer more comprehensive and characteristic syllabi over the next few years, and the industry takes account of a new generation of university-trained games designers, we will begin to see mutually beneficial change in both quarters.

David Surman co-founded the department of game design at the Newport School of Art, Media And Design (artschool.newport.ac.uk)



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Employ all humans

Stig Strand, head of games at Amikus Limited, speaks in defence of the role of recruitment agents

amikus[®]

Many of today's leading videogames industry organisations are recognising that the key to competitive advantage is no longer only in technology or finance, but in people. This is the one thing that will distinguish successful organisations of the future and the one thing that offers long-term sustainable success, which cannot be replicated by competitors.

Since 2000, the rollercoaster development lifecycle of the games industry has resulted in some companies frequently shedding and then re-hiring staff. Money cannot be thrown at projects at the last minute unless the return is greater than the investment, but this often results in staff finishing projects without further work to move on to. It's one of the biggest challenges which faces the industry: the need to find new ways to manage staffing levels across the different requirements of varied project stages. The closure of big names in the UK, including the likes of Acclaim, Rage, Argonaut and Silicon Dreams, led many companies to realise that recruitment strategy is a critical factor in ensuring survival and continual development.

A detailed understanding of an organisation's medium- and long-term business strategy is essential when identifying high potential individuals who can actively contribute to that strategy.

The games industry is becoming

more and more technologically advanced as it grows year on year, with studios continuing to raise the bar in terms of technical achievement. In the past this has resulted in the creation of new, more specialised roles within the industry, and this is being seen again as many companies prepare themselves for the next mainstream platforms. Increased variety in the type of roles available to candidates is already occurring in all aspects of the development team. This means not only brand-new roles to recruit for, but also an increased number in each team to

the CG film assets are so detailed and high quality that they demand it. Such technical director roles are not yet currently available in the games industry, but as technology advances, game assets will command that they need the kind of attention these individuals could bring to the development cycle.

So how do the world's development studios attract the world class individuals we are talking about, especially if the roles do not currently exist in the games sector? It's this shift that makes forward-thinking

How do the world's development studios attract the world-class individuals we are talking about, especially if the roles do not currently exist?

cope with the increase in game assets. Companies are now dissecting current job requirements for programmers and artists, and are recruiting two or three individuals to implement only part of this role, due to the complexity of each technical specialism. There are many examples of these. One such example is the advent of the technical artist, acting as a bridge between the artists and the programmers.

A fairly accurate forecast of the kinds of roles being created (along with positions that will be created in the future) can be made by taking a look at the film industry some years ago. It's nothing new to them to have a lighting or character technical director because

recruitment consultancies so vital to the future health of this industry. Agencies need to combine a detailed understanding of the industry with a client-driven approach which brings together expertise from a wide range of creative and technical industries. It's a solution which studios need to adopt if they intend to survive – and to profit from – the next generational leap.

Amikus offers one of the broadest range of services currently available in the videogame industry: it's uniquely client driven and many of the solutions it delivers are specifically designed according to the differing requirements of its clients, assisting them to identify, attract, recruit and retain the very best candidates from the UK and overseas. For more info about Amikus Games, contact gamesteam@amikus.com



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Last of the bedroom coders

Introversion's Chris Delay on another way to make it in today's videogame industry



If you are fascinated by the creative possibilities of games, and you've made the decision that you would very much like to explore those possibilities, the last place you should be looking for work is the games industry. Accepting a place at a commercial games company is a surefire way to ensure you will never have the chance to work on your own game ideas. If you are happy to work on somebody else's game and you don't really care what that game is, then you'll be fine.

But if you have your own strong game ideas, your own designs that you want to explore, then it is important to know before accepting a job that there is no chance you will ever be developing those games full time. There's a fairly high chance you will be spending your days working on some piece of licensed drivel that you have absolutely no creative interest in. Furthermore, if you are working for a particularly unscrupulous employer (and there are many in the games industry) you will find mandatory crunch time on your project eats up all of your evenings and weekends as well, which pretty much rules out moonlighting on your own game ideas. Making a successful career in the games industry requires you to let go of your childish dreams of developing your own games and accept your place as a salaried worker in a

grand team of salaried workers, all of whom are also well on their way to forgetting why they joined in the first place.

So what's the alternative if you've got game ideas in your head and you want to work on them? You've read the heading of this article, so you know I'm representing Introversion Software – an independent team of just four guys who have been making the games they wanted to make for nearly four years. In that time we've released two games – the cult hacker sim *Uplink*, and

retailer or a publisher, we might add), so how are you going to sustain yourself while you develop your games? Sales of indie games on the internet are always going to be considerably lower than their commercial counterparts, in the order of a few hundred a month, but it's all that is needed if you're a small team. Assuming you're selling at £20 and making £15 gross profit per copy (after production, VAT and delivery), just a hundred copies a month would earn you more than enough money to live comfortably. It is of

Of course, you have to pay the rent. We couldn't advocate forming your own company without some mention of the financial risks

recently the retro action game *Darwinia*. Both are widely regarded as extremely innovative and creative titles. We own our entire company, we finance our own games, and we self-publish on the internet and in the UK high-street (you might have seen our bright-green *Darwinia* boxes in your local games store).

Of course, you have to pay the rent. We couldn't advocate forming your own company without some mention of the financial risks. It's widely accepted that it is very difficult to make money from games if you are a developer (not quite so hard for the

course important to accept that the absence of a regular salary does make it a more risky lifestyle, and a poor-selling game could land you in financial trouble. However, if you have a 'hit' on your hands and start selling two hundred or three hundred a month then you'll be outpacing pretty much everyone under 30 who works in the 'real' games industry. Furthermore, you'll be your own boss, and, most importantly of all, you'll be making the games you want to make.

Chris Delay is part of Introversion Software, a four-man independent game-making team that stems from meeting at Imperial College, London







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